

## Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK inquiry submission

JRF is an independent organisation working to inspire social change through research, policy and practice. We welcome the opportunity to contribute evidence to this inquiry. Our submission is based on the findings from a recent multi-year research project exploring the impact of ethnicity on poverty rates (box 1). This work covers (among other things) the role of social networks, local labour markets; and access to public services.

If you would like to arrange a meeting with one of our experts to discuss the points raised please contact:

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### Box 1: the following reports from JRF's Poverty and ethnicity programme are available from our website:

- Holtom, H. Bottrill, I. and Watkins, J. (2013) Poverty and ethnicity in Wales
- Hudson, M., Netto, G., Sosenko, F., Noon, M., de Lima, P., Gilchrist, A. and Kamenou-Aigbekaen, N. (2013) In-work poverty, ethnicity and workplace cultures
- Irwin, J., McAreavey, R. and Murphy, N. (2014) Economic and social mobility among ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland
- Khan, O., Ahmet, A. and Watkins, J. (2014) Poverty and ethnicity: Balancing caring and earning for British Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali people
- Lalani, M., Metcalf, H., Tufekci, L., Corley, A., Rolfe, H. and George, A. (2014) How place influences employment outcomes for ethnic minorities
- McCabe, A. Gilchrist, A. Harris, K, Afridi, A. Kyprianou, P. (2013) Making the links: poverty, ethnicity and social networks
- Wallace, A., McAreavey, R. and Atkin, K. (2013) Poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland

## Introduction

Although the focus of our programme was not specifically on religion, given that many of the people affected are Muslims, we think its findings are highly relevant to the inquiry. We also think it is important to acknowledge that unpicking the precise relationship between religion and disadvantage, as opposed to the prejudice suffered by a person due to ethnic origins, socioeconomic class, educational disadvantage, or factors intrinsic to particular cultural and religious traditions such as family values that encourage women to remain in the home, can be difficult. All of these factors need to be considered alongside religion and ethnicity, as does the experience of racism to come up with truly effective solutions. Our evidence is also concentrated on the experiences of people on low incomes. We therefore have not answered the question related to people in professional and managerial roles.

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### **What are the specific challenges facing Muslim women in employment and the workplace?**

For most people, the two most important roles in life are caring for loved ones and working to earn a living. Over the past decades, more people have entered the labour market, while the proportion of those providing care has risen too. These developments create challenges for those seeking to 'balance' work and care, and are likely to continue given underlying demographic changes and developments in the labour market.

In 2014 JRF published research looking at the experiences and preferences of low-income Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali people in balancing work and care responsibilities (Khan et al). The report described the particular challenges faced by these ethnic minority groups, and the challenges for employers and policy. The methods comprised a desk-based literature review, a 1200 person survey on informal care among ethnic minorities, 60 related interviews on informal caring, 42 interviews on childcare in these three communities (including 10 among families caring for a disabled child), and three 'expert' focus groups to test our findings.

Almost every participant expressed concerns about access to the labour market and many mentioned discrimination. Many participants highlighted concerns that are widely mentioned by carers generally, namely the difficulty of finding work that they can balance with their caring responsibilities. Although Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali participants had somewhat different experiences and views about how best they could balance work and care, there was significant demand across all three groups for more flexible working and better part-time work.

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Another key finding was that ethnic minority people do not have generic attitudes to 'caring'. This relates to the role of cultural or religious preferences in attitudes to caring, and in particular to formal caring services. Among Pakistani and particularly Somali respondents, these considerations were important in explaining the low use of formal childcare services. This appears to be related to parental emphasis on transmitting cultural values and practices to their children. Some parents would be satisfied if such care was more culturally sensitive, or if some staff shared their cultural or religious values, though a significant minority preferred to be the primary carer for their child at least until secondary school. Awareness or knowledge of services is as important as cultural preferences. Very few Pakistani and Somali respondents were aware of free childcare and they also were not always certain about the support available for their disabled children and older relatives.

Within the workplace a key issue for respondents was a lack of transparency surrounding developmental opportunities which would facilitate being considered for promotion (Hudson et al). This was related to their degree of integration within the workplace, including inclusion in the same flows of information as their white Scottish and British counterparts. Many felt that their skills and experience were under-recognised within the workplace, citing a tendency for stereotyping and prejudice. For example, one individual felt that management stereotyping of her capabilities and her language skills was preventing her career development. Some ethnic minority workers questioned whether people from an ethnic minority background conformed to managers' expectations of who would readily fit into managerial roles.

Ethnic minorities were also more likely to complain of unequal treatment or exclusion within the workplace, which was often difficult to challenge through formal processes. Low-paid workers of all backgrounds spoke of informal workplace practices which had the potential to undermine equal opportunities policies and processes, for example, informal recruitment practices. It was clear that managers' mind-sets had a powerful influence on the informal workplace practices restricting progression. Where managers are positively disposed to certain groups of employees, this could result in developmental opportunities which would ultimately result in promotion. Conversely, where managers are negatively biased (consciously or unconsciously) towards certain groups of employees, this could result in persistent low wage traps and wasted potential (Hudson et al).

## Recommendations

- Employers should support more flexible working. They should monitor how far they offer flexibility when employees request it and consider (unpaid) sabbaticals and longer leave policies.
- Ethnic minorities need better information on childcare options. Too many ethnic minority parents are not aware of free provision. Local authorities and health providers must better inform parents of the 30 free hours of early education for 3 and 4 year olds.
- Further research and practice is needed on improving the supply of childcare generally and for sessional or irregular childcare hours in particular. This is particularly relevant for ethnic minority groups who often work irregular, night or weekend hours (e.g. in restaurants, hotels, or as taxi drivers).
- Care homes should provide care that better caters to the needs of ethnic minorities. This could include: ethnic-specific care homes; more training of care workers; more diverse television and cultural offerings; partnering with local restaurants to provide more diverse meals.

## What barriers to accessing training and employment support exist for Muslims?

For many families in the UK, employment does not provide a route out of poverty. Ethnic minorities tend to be highly represented in low-paid work, particularly Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and migrant workers.

Among the steps that low-paid workers reported that they took to progress to better paid work were involvement in further education and training. Every single study in JRF's poverty and ethnicity programme raised the role of English as additional language training. Individuals and service providers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland argued that these services were central to enabling people from some ethnic minority and migrant groups to work, train, develop social networks, access services and support their children.

However respondents faced considerable challenges in combining work with study, which involved dealing with physical and mental fatigue, and meeting the cost of such courses. Those involved in modern apprenticeship schemes spoke positively of the benefits of a structured route which allowed them to gain work experience and widen their career options.

The role of supportive line managers was identified as crucial to skills development. Such managers provided regular and constructive feedback and offered encouragement to employees to develop. However, these managers tended to be the exception rather than the norm. Examples of unsupportive managerial practices included lack of engagement in personal development review processes and holding back staff from progression opportunities. Training that was easily available tended to be focused on enabling workers to do the current job well, with less training enabling workers to develop new skills. This is of concern within the wider context of a declining demand for low-level skills.

Where distinct barriers were identified for ethnic minority staff, these were related to weak language skills, lack of self-confidence, too few ethnic minority role models in leadership and little organisational understanding of cultural differences. Worryingly, managers did not appear to recognise the scope for informal workplace practices to undermine equal opportunities policies and processes, for example, through informal recruitment through social networks, particularly in the private sector.

## Recommendations

- Employers should take a strategic approach towards developing skills among low-paid workers and enabling them to progress to better paid work. Data on ethnicity must be better collected among employers, including in the hiring, progression, disciplinary and redundancy processes, and segmented by seniority and wages.
- Such approaches should be sensitive to the additional challenges faced by ethnic minorities and of the potential for informal workplace practices to undermine equal opportunities policies. Managers' objectives should include providing development opportunities for their staff and ensuring that workers from all backgrounds are included in these.
- Workforce data should be regularly reviewed at national, local and organisational levels and action taken to ensure that ethnic minorities are represented at all levels. Local authorities should work with stakeholders in Local Enterprise Partnerships to encourage employers to support progression.
- Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers should monitor outcomes for customers from different ethnic backgrounds, including sustainability and progression in work.
- Procurement policies and processes should ensure that low-paid workers providing outsourced services are supported to progress out of poverty, including through payment of the Living Wage and implementation of equal opportunities policies.
- There should be more ESOL funding to improve employability among the many men and women who would like to work and improve their English.

## What initiatives have been successful in tackling barriers to employment faced by Muslims?

Many case study organisations had good practice examples which were supportive of low-paid workers. Good practice initiatives included adoption of the Living Wage, easy access to extensive training opportunities and an anonymous helpline for complaints and concerns. However, few initiatives were specifically directed towards enabling low-paid workers, including ethnic minorities, to develop a career path. Private sector case study organisations were least likely to adopt initiatives that supported ethnic minorities in the workplace. Where monitoring of workforce data was undertaken, this tended to focus on recruitment rather than progression (Hudson et al).

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## About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is an endowed foundation funding a UK-wide research and development programme.

Since 2010, we have supported research into the nature, scale and scope of forced labour in the UK – a comprehensive collection of independent studies on forced labour, including research into business models and supply chains, specific industries and locations, and experiences of labour exploitation.

All research published by JRF, including publications in the references, is available to download from [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)